

A productive birding transect from highland Zimbabwe to coastal Mozambique

Chris Lotz

Un transect productif depuis les montagnes du Zimbabwe jusqu'à la côte du Mozambique. Un voyage ornithologique de deux semaines depuis Harare, au milieu du plateau du Zimbabwe, jusqu'à la ville côtière de Beira, au Mozambique, traverse une grande variété d'habitats et peut générer une liste impressionnante d'espèces à distribution restreinte. Le visiteur avisé a aussi de bonnes chances d'observer des espèces plus répandues mais généralement difficiles à voir. À Harare on peut trouver quelques oiseaux rares des zones humides, et en voyageant vers l'est, en direction du Mozambique, on a accès à une variété d'espèces du miombo. Les montagnes de l'est, à cheval sur la frontière du Zimbabwe avec le Mozambique, sont le meilleur ou le seul site pour plusieurs espèces de la forêt afromontagnarde. Finalement, la vaste plaine côtière mozambicaine, y compris Gorongosa et le delta du Zambèze, héberge nombre d'autres espèces locales. L'article indique où trouver les espèces intéressantes le long de ce transect et fournit des informations concernant la meilleure période de visite et les aspects logistiques.

Summary. A two-week journey from Harare, in the centre of Zimbabwe's high plateau, to the coastal city of Beira in Mozambique traverses a wide range of habitats and generates a respectable list of range-restricted birds, along with above-average chances of more widespread but generally elusive birds. Harare itself attracts some rare wetland birds, and travelling eastwards towards Mozambique then affords easy access to a suite of miombo woodland birds. The Eastern Highlands, straddling the Zimbabwe/Mozambique border, is the best or only site for several Afromontane forest birds. Finally, the vast Mozambican coastal plain, including areas such as Gorongosa and the Zambezi Delta, hosts numerous other localised birds. This article describes where to find the 'specials' of this rich transect, and provides advice on timing and logistics.

Mozambique is poorly known as a birding destination except amongst southern African birders, who have been visiting the country in substantial numbers for the almost two decades since the civil war ended. These visitors are in search of range-restricted birds

as well as more widespread species relatively easy to locate in Mozambique such as **African Pitta** *Pitta angolensis*. By birding the mountains straddling the border between Mozambique and Zimbabwe, even relatively 'old hands' will almost inevitably encounter new birds, such as



Figure 1. From Harare to Beira: birding a diverse transect from the Mashonaland Plateau to the coastal plain.

De Harare à Beira : un transect varié du Plateau du Mashonaland à la plaine côtière.



Figure 2. African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* typically starts breeding in Mozambique in late November–early December (Hugh Chittenden)

Au Mozambique, la Brève de l'Angola *Pitta angolensis* commence normalement à nicher fin novembre–début décembre (Hugh Chittenden)



Figure 3. (left) Swynnerton's Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertoni* is quite easy to see in Zimbabwe, and also occurs in small areas of Mozambique (the Gorongosa and Mabu massifs) and Tanzania (Niall Perrins)

Le Rougegorge de Swynnerton *Swynnertonia swynnertoni* est relativement facile à observer au Zimbabwe et se trouve aussi localement au Mozambique (les massifs de Gorongosa et de Mabu) et en Tanzanie (Niall Perrins)

Figure 4. (right) Boulder Chat *Pinarornis plumosus* is a Zimbabwean near-endemic (Hugh Chittenden)

Le Rochassier des éboulis *Pinarornis plumosus* est quasi endémique au Zimbabwe (Hugh Chittenden)

Swynnerton's Robin *Swynnertonia swynnertoni*, **Chirinda Apalis** *Apalis chirindensis* and **Roberts's (Briar) Warbler** *Oreophilais robertsi*, all of which are most easily seen in Zimbabwe. **Boulder Chat** *Pinarornis plumosus* is then within easy reach slightly further west towards Harare. Zimbabwe and Mozambique also possess large tracts of *Brachystegia* (miombo) woodland inhabited by a host of south-central African endemics found neither in South nor East Africa.

This article describes a birding journey (Fig. 1) originating in Harare in the middle of the Mashonaland Plateau of central Zimbabwe, through some fine miombo woodland to the forested Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe that continue across the border into Mozambique, and then finally to the steaming coastal plains which occupy the bulk of Mozambique's land surface. The journey across the coastal plain is interrupted by Mount Gorongosa (inhabited by **Green-headed Oriole** *Oriolus chlorocephalus* and many other specialities), before we continue to the Zambezi Delta and eventually to Beira on Mozambique's central coast.

This route, which is easily followed on a 10–14-day trip, provides access to some of Zimbabwe and Mozambique's finest birding. Birders who have already visited Tanzania / Malaŵi and South Africa, but who are looking for birds absent from or tough to locate in those countries (and elsewhere) will find this transect productive. Further south in Mozambique, there are quite a number of birds that are endemic to southern Mozambique and extreme north-eastern South Africa, but since these are fairly easy to find in South Africa, I ignore them here. Further north, many of the species can also be found quite easily in Tanzania and Malaŵi, except **Namuli Apalis** *Apalis lynesii*, which requires what can be described as a small expedition. In this article, I concentrate on a relatively poorly birded but highly productive route that currently only southern African birders know well. I will focus almost solely on 'specials' tough to find elsewhere.

I will discuss the following sites, during the descent from the high-altitude city of Harare to the hot and humid coast: (1) Harare's wetlands—**Streaky-breasted Flufftail** *Sarothrura boehmi*



Figure 5. Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis*—Rio Savane is a good place to find this unpredictable and often elusive species (Per Holmen)

L'Anomalospize parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis* – Rio Savane est un bon site pour cette espèce imprévisible et très discrète (Per Holmen)

and other rare birds within the city's limits; (2) Miombo woodland between Harare and the Eastern Highlands with their associated endemics and **Boulder Chat**; (3) the Eastern Highlands and Lowlands with two endemics and numerous other species that are most easily located here; (4) Mount Gorongosa, a massif rising from the coastal plain; (5) the Zambezi River Delta for forest birds, several of them range-restricted; and (6) the Rio Savane wetlands.

Harare

Monavale Vlei, Marlborough Vlei and some other, lesser known wetlands within the suburbs of Harare are excellent sites for finding several rare birds, including **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** and **Striped Crake** *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis*. Another elusive bird still sometimes found here is **Blue Quail** *Coturnix adansonii*, although it is more frequently seen in Mozambique, for example at Rio Savane at the opposite end of the transect described here. **Black-rumped Buttonquail** *Turnix nanus* also occurs here but is perhaps more



Figure 6. Gurney's Sugarbird *Promerops gurneyi*—a representative of a family endemic to southern Africa (Hugh Chittenden)

Le Promérops de Gurney *Promerops gurneyi* – un représentant d'une famille endémique à l'Afrique australe (Hugh Chittenden)

easily encountered on the Mozambican coastal plain. These four species, and other commoner rallids, are usually found in wet years between January and March—see comments at the end of this article on timing your trip. The latter two species also can be seen in Mozambique during the dry season. In addition, these wetlands are excellent areas in which to encounter **African Grass Owl** *Tyto capensis*, **Rosy-throated Longclaw** *Macronyx ameliae*, **Locust Finch** *Paludipasser locustella*, **Cuckoo Finch** (Parasitic Weaver) *Anomalospiza imberbis* and others—quite a number of these are frequently also seen at the Rio Savane near Beira in Mozambique.

Miombo woodlands

Harare itself has excellent miombo birding but the woodlands en route to the Eastern Highlands, especially around Goshu Park, have more species and one can find the bulk of Zimbabwe's miombo birds by spending a day between Harare and the Eastern Highlands. There are also superb (perhaps even better) miombo sites north of Harare, which can be visited if one has two nights in Harare and

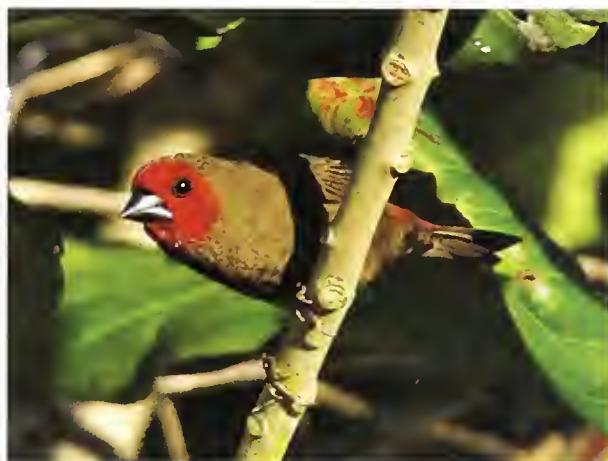


Figure 7. (left) Zimbabwe is one of the prime countries to look for three flufftails: Buff-spotted *Sarothrura elegans* (Hugh Chittenden), Striped *S. affinis* and Streaky-breasted *S. boehmi*.

Le Zimbabwe est un des meilleurs pays pour rechercher trois petits râles du genre *Sarothrura* : le Râle ponctué *Sarothrura elegans* (Hugh Chittenden), le Râle affin *S. affinis* et le Râle de Böhm *S. boehmi*.

Figure 8. (right) Lesser Seedcracker *Pyrenestes minor*, which is largely restricted to Mozambique and Malaŵi, can be tough to find within its limited range (Niall Perrins)

Le Petit Pyréneste *Pyrenestes minor*, qui est principalement confiné au Mozambique et au Malawi, peut être difficile à trouver dans son aire de distribution restreinte (Niall Perrins)

if too little rain has fallen to justify spending time at the seasonal wetlands within the city itself.

Restricted-range species of the Zambezan biome that are quite easy to see midway between Harare and the border with Mozambique (Appendix 5 in Fishpool & Evans 2001) include **Boulder Chat**, **Miombo Rock Thrush** *Monticola angolensis*, **Cinnamon-breasted Tit** *Parus (rufiventris) pallidiventris*, **Miombo Tit** *P. griseiventris*, **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird** *Cinnyris manoensis* and **Black-eared Seedeater** *Serinus (Crithagra) mennelli*. **Spotted Creeper** *Salpornis spilonotus* is quite common, often in mixed flocks that contain good numbers of miombo specialists. Many other birds can also be found here, including **Shelley's Francolin** *Francolinus (=Scleroptila) shelleyi*, **Pennant-winged Nightjar** *Macrodipteryx vexillarius*, **Woodland Pipit** *Anthus nyassae*, **White-breasted Cuckooshrike** *Coracina pectoralis*, **Green-capped Eremomela** *Eremomela scotops*, **Southern Hyliota** *Hyliota australis*, **Lazy (Rock-loving) Cisticola** *Cisticola aberrans*, **Collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicollis*, **Western Violet-backed Sunbird** *Anthreptes longuemarei* and **Cabanis's Bunting** *Emberiza cabanisi*.

Eastern Highlands and Lowlands of Zimbabwe (continuing into Mozambique)

It takes half a day to reach the Eastern Highlands from Harare, and a full day to find most of the miombo endemics en route. The Eastern Highlands reach an altitude of 2,593 m (Cohen *et al.* 2006) and contain healthy tracts of Afromontane forest as well as pristine grassland protected within Nyanga National Park. These latter are excellent for the Vulnerable **Blue Swallow** *Hirundo atrocaerulea* and the elusive **Striped Flufftail** *Sarothrura affinis*. The forests of 'The Vumba' and other sites within the Eastern Highlands are arguably the easiest place to find **Swynnerton's Robin**. This and the highly localised Zimbabwe / Mozambique forest endemics, **Chirinda Apalis** and **Roberts's (Briar) Warbler**, are usually found here with ease and this is probably the best site in the world for the three last-mentioned species. The highly range-restricted **Stripe-cheeked Greenbul** *Andropadus milanjensis* is very common here. Less localised but nevertheless biome-restricted Afrotropical highlands species easily found in the Eastern Highlands include **Grey Cuckooshrike** *Coracina caesia*, **Orange Ground Thrush** *Zoothera gurneyi* (quite easy to see here), **Barratt's Warbler** *Bradypterus barratti*, **Gurney's Sugarbird** *Promerops gurneyi*, **Olive**



Clockwise from above

Figure 9. Zambezi (Green) Indigobird *Vidua codringtoni* sings conspicuously from atop large dead trees during January to March in the eastern lowlands of Zimbabwe and at a few sites on the Mozambican coastal plain; it often occurs alongside a couple of other indigobird species (Niall Perrins)

Le Combassou vert *Vidua codringtoni* chante au sommet de grands arbres morts de janvier à mars dans les basses terres à l'est du Zimbabwe et sur quelques sites dans la plaine côtière mozambicaine ; il se trouve souvent en compagnie d'autres espèces de combassous (Niall Perrins)

Figure 10. Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti* is usually only seen when performing its display flight during which it calls constantly (Per Holmen)

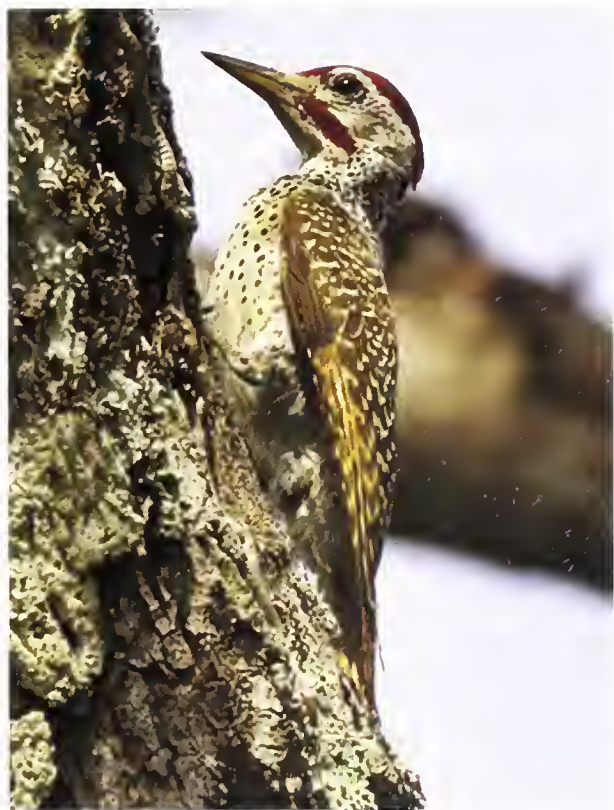
Le Coucou d'Audebert *Pachycoccyx audeberti* est souvent vu lors de sa parade en vol pendant laquelle il chante constamment (Per Holmen)

Figure 11. Reichenow's Woodpecker *Campethera bennetti scriptoricauda* is a south-central African subspecies that is relatively easy to find in Mozambique (Niall Perrins)

Le Pic de Reichenow *Campethera bennetti scriptoricauda* est une race endémique de l'Afrique australe centrale que l'on peut observer relativement facilement au Mozambique (Niall Perrins)

Bushshrike *Chlorophoneus olivaceus* and **Red-faced Crimsonwing** *Cryptospiza reichenovii*. These forests are extremely rich, being full of more widespread birds—one worthy of special mention is **Buff-spotted Flufftail** *Sarothrura elegans* because this is a relatively easy place (due to the habitat) to actually see, not just hear, this extremely skulking bird.

Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus* can be seen anywhere in the area, but it is best located at a breeding colony accessed via the Honde Valley in the nearby Eastern Lowlands. The latter region



is also excellent for **Pallid Honeyguide** *Indicator meliphilus* and **Lesser Seedcracker** *Pyrenestes minor* (one of the toughest 'specials' of this birding route) along with more widespread birds such as **Ayres's Hawk Eagle** *Hieraaetus ayresii*, **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill** *Bycanistes brevis*, **Short-winged Cisticola** *Cisticola brachypterus*, **Black-fronted**



Counterclockwise from left

Figure 12. Red-winged Warbler *Heliolais erythropterus* is common around the base of Mount Gorongosa (Hugh Chittenden)

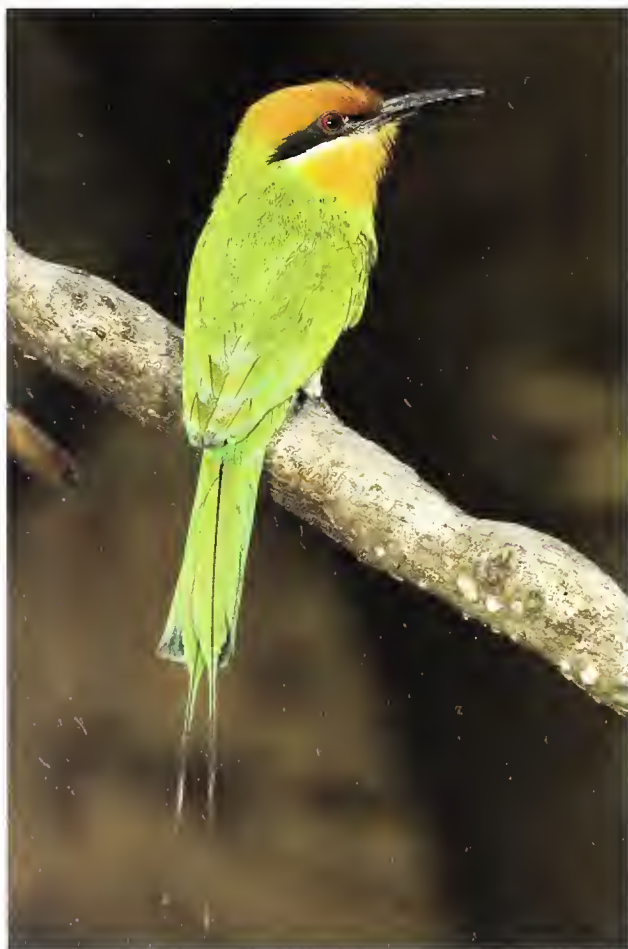
La Prinia à ailes rousses *Heliolais erythropterus* est commune à la base du Mont Gorongosa (Hugh Chittenden)

Figure 13. Böhm's Bee-eater *Merops boehmi* has been observed just north of the Zambezi River in Mozambique (Hugh Chittenden)

Le Guêpier de Böhm *Merops boehmi* a été vu juste au nord du Zambèze au Mozambique (Hugh Chittenden)

Figure 14. East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi* is a common but skulking inhabitant of the Zambezi Delta forests (Hugh Chittenden)

Le Rougegorge de Gunning *Sheppardia gunningi* est une espèce commune mais difficile à observer des forêts du delta du Zambèze (Hugh Chittenden)



Bushshrike *Chlorophoneus nigrifrons*, **Marsh** (Anchieta's) **Tchagra** *Tchagra minutus anchietae*, **Red-throated** (Peter's) **Twinspot** *Hypargos niveoguttatus*, and many others. Because the Eastern Lowlands are contiguous with the coastal plain of central Mozambique, these birds are also often sought there. One of the most special birds now well 'staked-out' in the Eastern Lowlands (but in the Burma Valley below 'The Vumba', not in the Honde Valley) and at a few sites in central Mozambique is **Zambezi** (Green) **Indigobird** *Vidua codringtoni*. Frustratingly, this bird attains full breeding plumage only in the wet season (mainly January to March) when it is reasonably easy to find (especially if their display perches are known) as well as to identify.



Figure 15. (left) White-chested Alethe *Alethe fuelleborni*, a range-restricted ‘skulker’, is not uncommon in the Zambezi Delta area (Hugh Chittenden)

L’Alèche à poitrine blanche *Alethe fuelleborni* est une espèce à distribution restreinte assez commune dans la zone du delta du Zambèze (Hugh Chittenden)



Figure 16. (right) Livingstone’s Flycatcher *Erythrocercus livingstonei* is found in the Zambezi Valley and its tributaries, as well as in coastal forests of Mozambique and Tanzania (Niall Perrins)

L’Erythrocerque de Livingstone *Erythrocercus livingstonei* se trouve dans la vallée du Zambèze et ses affluents ainsi que dans les forêts côtières du Mozambique et de la Tanzanie (Niall Perrins)

Into Mozambique—across the flats to Mount Gorongosa

The Eastern Highlands straddle the international boundary between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. All of the Eastern Highlands ‘specials’ mentioned above can also be found just across the border in Mozambique, for example at the beautiful Mount Tsetserra, but they are more easily found in Zimbabwe. However, after travelling further east into Mozambique, the isolated massif of Mount Gorongosa rises abruptly above the coastal plain to 1,863 m (www.gorongosa.net). This is an excellent site for **Green-headed Oriole**. There are a few isolated populations of this unusual oriole between here and Tanzania, but this mountain is the only place to find the endemic subspecies *O. c. speculifer*. **Pallid Honeyguide** is usually heard, but not always easily seen, in the same forest that the oriole inhabits. Isolated populations of **Swynnerton’s Robin** and **Chirinda Apalis** also occur here. The heathland atop the massif supports an endemic subspecies of **Greater Double-collared Sunbird** *Nectarinia afra amicornum*.

The forests supporting the important birds mentioned above have been severely reduced

in size, but the mountain has recently been incorporated into Gorongosa National Park, and its sacred status also affords limited protection—in fact, special permission from the local chief needs to be obtained before birding this site. The ascent of the mountain from one of the accommodation establishments near its base usually produces **Marsh** (Anchieta’s) **Tchagra**, and can also be good for **Lesser Seedcracker** and even **Blue Quail**, along with more widespread birds such as **Moustached Grass Warbler** *Melocichla mentalis* and **Maggie Mannikin** *Spermestes fringilloides*.

Finally, the plains around the mountain, incorporating the original Gorongosa National Park and nearby areas, should be searched for **Pel’s Fishing Owl** *Scotopelia peli* (recently discovered in this area and probably more common in Mozambique than current records suggest), **Pennant-winged Nightjar**, **Thick-billed Cuckoo** *Pachycoccyx audeberti*, **Reichenow’s Woodpecker** *Campethera bennetti scriptoricauda*, **Black-and-white** (Vanga) **Flycatcher** *Bias musicus* (which is almost guaranteed at Chitengo Camp), **Red-winged Warbler** *Heliolais erythropterus* and **Maggie Mannikin**.



Figure 17. Southern Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus fasciolatus* is generally scarce throughout its small range along the coast from Tanzania to Zululand (Niall Perrins)

Le Circaète barré *Circaetus fasciolatus* est généralement peu commun à travers son aire de distribution principalement la long de la côte de la Tanzanie au Zululand (Niall Perrins)

Zambezi River Delta

The transect now proceeds north to the Zambezi River Delta, where vast tracts of lowland forest and miombo woodland have been protected by hunting concessions. Most birders are now visiting this area, specifically Coutada (Hunting Concession) 12, instead of the ‘classic’ Chinizua, which is deteriorating rapidly as the rate of deforestation there has been unprecedented. Chinizua is described in detail by Cohen *et al.* (2006) but birding there now is not nearly as good as it was when that book was published. When access across the Chinizua Stream bridge is possible, good forests with excellent birds can still be accessed, and the exciting area between here and the coast might be worth exploring if you are well equipped for a ‘real adventure’.

However, it is much easier just to visit Coutada 12, which is highly accessible and probably holds much larger populations of all of the ‘specials’ mentioned below. Please note that Coutada 12 is private property and it is essential to contact the owners and pay a nominal fee. For more information on who to contact, please write to info@birdingecotours.co.za. Only a small part of Coutada 12 has been thoroughly explored to date by birders (usually looking primarily for the almost ‘staked-out’ **African Pittas**), and other nearby Zambezi Delta coutadas are also fabulous for birding, but very poorly explored—which means that new discoveries can still be made. Coutada 11 was described in an excellent report by Rossouw & Sutherland (1999), but since most birders find what they want in the easily accessible part of Coutada 12, Coutada 11 is often ignored, and in fact the remainder of the vast Zambezi Delta remains amazingly under-birded. There is even the possibility of finding the localised **Böhm’s Bee-eater** *Merops boehmi* just south of the Zambezi, and this species would be new for the region dealt with by the southern African field guides. The still-pristine Inhamatinga, Mozambique’s largest forest, which had been virtually ignored by birders except for those patches extending into Coutada 12, has recently been found to hold, among others, a large population of **White-chested Alethe** *Alethe fuelleborni* (Davies *et al.* in prep.). Other Mozambican forests contiguous with the famous Haroni–Rusitu River confluence in the foothills of Zimbabwe’s Chimanimani Mountains also beg exploration.

Now well known (at least compared to when the Cohen *et al.* 2006 bird-finding guide was published) Coutada 12 is very productive birding territory. Two highly range-restricted skulkers are very common here—**East Coast Akalat** *Sheppardia gunningi* and **White-chested Alethe**. If you know their calls, you will realise how locally common both species are, but acquiring views of them requires considerable patience. Other important birds to look for in this area include **Southern Banded Snake Eagle** *Circaetus fasciolatus*, **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo** *Cercococcyx montanus*, **Thick-billed Cuckoo**, **Tiny Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus debilis* (very common), **Black-headed Apalis** *Apalis melanocephala*, **Livingstone’s Flycatcher** *Erythrocerus*



livingstonei, **Plain-backed Sunbird** *Anthreptes reichenowi*, and **Chestnut-fronted Helmetshrike** *Prionops scopifrons* (which sometimes occurs in mixed flocks with the other two southern African helmetshrikes). **Mangrove Kingfisher** *Halcyon senegaloides* is also common here but is resident in a non-mangrove habitat.

Although widespread, one of the most sought-after species in the Zambezi Delta is **African Pitta**, since this has become one of only a handful of fairly reliable sites for this bird. African Pitta breeds in fair numbers along the Lower Zambezi River, where it is relatively easy to find. In late November and early December, after the first rains fall, usually around this time of year, the pitta begins displaying. During this period, males spend much of their time on a chosen perch 1–9 m off the ground (Hockey *et al.* 2005) from where they periodically make a hopping display accompanied by a far-carrying call. Birders can find displaying birds with some ease once they understand the ventriloquial nature of the call. The species is very tough to find when not displaying as it skulks on the forest floor.

Rio Savane

This very extensive wetland system is conveniently located just outside Beira, the end-point of the transect and where I suggest flying out of, unless you wish to proceed south or north in search of birds also occurring in South or East Africa. **Olive-headed Weaver** *Ploceus olivaceiceps*, as well



Figure 18. (left) Mangrove Kingfisher *Halcyon senegaloides* is common in deep forest of the Zambezi Delta far from any mangroves (Hugh Chittenden)

Le Martin-chasseur des mangroves *Halcyon senegaloides* est commun dans la forêt du delta du Zambèze, loin des mangroves (Hugh Chittenden)

Figure 19. (right) Lemon-breasted Canary *Serinus citrinipectus* is almost restricted to Mozambique (Niall Perrins)

Le Serin à poitrine citron *Serinus citrinipectus* est quasi confiné au Mozambique (Niall Perrins)

as Mozambique / South Africa endemics such as **Rudd's Apalis** *Apalis ruddi*, **Neergaard's Sunbird** *Cinnyris neergaardi*, **Pink-throated Twinspot** *Hypargos margaritatus* and **Lemon-breasted Canary** *Serinus* (= *Crithagra*) *citrinipectus*, are, for example, found in the Panda miombo woodlands, and after birding this area flying from Inhambane would make better sense. If you proceed north, there are many good sites to visit, but the overlap in birds with Malawi and Tanzania is marked.

Since Mozambique opened up to birders after the civil war ended, Rio Savane has become a bigger and better site for some, but not all,

of the water-associated species mentioned for Harare's wetlands at the beginning of this article. Moreover, some of these species remain year-round at Rio Savane, whereas in Harare they may be more seasonal. Birds to look for at Rio Savane include **Blue Quail**, **Short-tailed Pipit** *Anthus brachyurus*, **Locust Finch** and **Cuckoo Finch**. **Rufous-bellied Heron** *Ardeola rufiventris* abounds and interestingly this is one of southern Africa's best sites to find **Eurasian (Great) Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*.

When to go and what to expect

Streaky-breasted Flufftail, **Striped Crake** and other wetland birds are most easily seen between January and March but only in years of good rainfall. In drier years they may only be present in small numbers and can be extremely difficult to find (not that these elusive rallids are ever *easy* to see). **Zambezi Indigobird** is also most easily seen between January and March when it is in breeding plumage and displaying conspicuously. However, Mozambique is logistically easier to visit in the dry season and at the very beginning of the wet season (which is usually early December) due to many of the roads becoming muddy. This is also the only period that observers have a realistic chance of locating **African Pitta**, which is extremely elusive once it has ceased displaying and has laid eggs. It can still be stumbled across until April or even May before it departs for equatorial Africa where it spends its non-breeding season, but seeing one at this time will require considerable good fortune. In the austral summer the local 'specials' are joined by many Eurasian and intra-African migrants, which can include species rare in southern Africa such as **Collared Flycatcher**. A couple of species such as **Mascarene Martin** *Phedina borbonica* and **Malagasy Pond Heron** *Ardeola idae* migrate from Madagascar to the mainland coast of Mozambique during the austral winter, and some birders visit then with the aim of adding these birds to their regional lists.

Mozambique is extremely hot and humid in summer (November–March) but this is the best time to find some of the globally localised species that are the focus of this article. However, quite a number can just as easily be found in winter. Much of Zimbabwe has milder weather since large parts of the country are on the Mashonaland Plateau (Harare, for example, is almost 1,500 m above

sea level), and in the Eastern Highlands it can get rather cold even in midsummer. The Eastern Lowlands of Zimbabwe are just as 'steaming' as Mozambique, as is the Zambezi Valley bordering Zambia.

Malaria is a potential risk throughout this transect, especially after the rains have fallen. Africa's large mammals sometimes also pose a threat. Landmines may still be present in some areas but the consensus opinion is that they don't present a risk at the birding sites described, and I am unaware of any problems in the almost two decades since the war ended, but one does need to consider the danger.

Infrastructure

Zimbabwe possesses an excellent network of well-surfaced paved roads, meaning that a normal car is perfectly adequate for visiting most of the birding areas throughout the country. There is also a fantastic network of B&B establishments and hotels. I usually recommend the comfortable but basic ones with en suite bathrooms, but in some areas upmarket options are also available.

Mozambique's infrastructure has been steadily improving since the civil war ended in 1992. However, roads to some of the birding areas, especially in the wet season, certainly require a high-clearance 4x4 vehicle. Accommodation in Mozambique is typically rustic but adequate for most birders, albeit perhaps barely so. Options are improving as the years go by. In some instances, I recommend staying at lodges that are fairly comfortable—the main disadvantage is that these establishments are not always sited at the best birding sites; for example, Mpingwe is approximately an hour from Coutada 12, which adds considerably to the driving each day. I recommend that birders consider some days of camping when in Mozambique, although all of the 'specials' can be seen without doing this.

Recommended accommodation

I usually start with Crake Cottage in Harare (crakecottage@yoafrica.com), which is conveniently situated close to Monavale Vlei. Proceeding to the Eastern Highlands, White Horse Inn (www.whitehorseinn.co.zw) and Seldomseen (www.seldomseen.co.zw) are often-used places in 'The Vumba'. There are numerous establishments slightly further north around

Inyanga National Park, whilst in the nearby Honde Valley below Inyanga, Aberfoye (www.aberfoylelodge.com) is my usual choice. Crossing into Mozambique, Casa Msika (www.sabirding.co.za/birdspot/140103.asp) is a good place to stay if accommodation is needed to break the journey. Otherwise you might continue straight to Gorongosa where the Gorongosa Adventures camp (previously Envirotrade camp; gorongosa-adventures.blogspot.com) is a convenient, but more rustic, option compared to Chitengo Camp (www.gorongosa.net/en/page/accommodations/accommodations) within the national park. Gorongosa Adventures offers excellent trips up Mount Gorongosa in search of the special birds, and they organise permission from the chief and other logistics sometimes tricky to arrange on your own. To access Coutada 12, Mpingwe Camp (www.dalmann.com/index.php?pageID=10) is apparently the closest establishment and is a fairly comfortable place. In Beira, many places are available and while most people prefer to stay near the beach, I sometimes use the rather rustic Bispo Hotel, which is a little closer to Rio Savane on the outskirts of Beira. Alternatively, I stay at the Rio Savane Resort (www.mozambique-travelservice.com/beira/rio-savane-beira-mozambique.htm) but ferry times across the estuary to the wetlands don't fit a birder's schedule, unless you can persuade the owner to add special departures. Please e-mail info@birdingecotours.co.za for additional contact details for any of these establishments.

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 - PO Box 215, Newlands, 7725, Western Cape, South Africa. E-mail: info@birdingecotours.co.za*
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